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ABSTRACT

A study of 80 teachers who were part of a reduction in force (RIF) effort in a large midwestern city was conducted. The study investigated: (1) characteristics of the RIF'd teachers; (2) reactions to RIF notice; (3) steps taken by teachers to prevent the RIF action; (4) resources used by RIF teachers to seek new positions; and (5) characteristics of RIF teachers that affected their willingness to relocate. The average RIF teacher was 36 years old and had 8.6 years of teaching experience. Teachers were most often angry at the RIF action. Among the 35 percent who tried to prevent the action, the most frequent strategy employed was enrolling in college coursework. Subjects who were married or who considered themselves secondary wage earners were less willing than other teachers to relocate. Positions were most frequently sought for: (1) teaching in another school district; (2) training in business or industry; and (3) management in business or industry. (CB)

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Reduction in Force: An Exploratory Study of Suburban Teachers and Implications for Teacher Education

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REDUCTION IN FORCE
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SELECTED TEACHERS

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were:

1. to investigate the characteristics of suburban teachers who received reduction in force (RIF) notices.
2. to investigate the reactions of teachers upon receiving a RIF notice.
3. to investigate the steps taken by teachers to prevent being RIF'd.
4. to investigate the type of resources utilized by RIF'd teachers when seeking a new position or a new career.
5. to investigate those characteristics of the RIF'd teachers that affected their willingness or unwillingness to relocate.

METHOD

Subjects. The subjects for this study were 80 RIF'd teachers from 17 suburban school districts adjacent to a large midwestern city. The teachers were attending career workshops jointly sponsored by one of the school districts and a major local university. The workshop sessions included a) self assessment techniques, b) the development of short term and long range career goals, and c) job searching strategies. At the time data were collected the level of unemployment in the metropolitan area was one of the highest in the nation and the school districts were facing enrollment declines and/or financial difficulties.

Data source. The first questionnaire, administered by the workshop directors, provided data about a) demographics, b) initial reactions to the RIF notice, and c) willingness or unwillingness to relocate. Seventy-six of the original subjects completed a second questionnaire administered ten months after the conclusion of the workshop. The second questionnaire provided information about the subjects' a) current job status, b) the factors affecting their willingness or unwillingness to relocate, and c) actual steps taken by the teachers to reduce the probability of receiving another RIF notice and/or securing a new position or career.

RESULTS

Profile of RIF'd teacher. The age of the RIF'd teacher ranged from 24 to 60 years with a mean of 36.9 years and a standard deviation of 8.6 years. Thirty-four percent (34%) were single and forty-six percent (46%) considered themselves the primary wage earner. The profession of the spouses varied widely with the largest number (15%) in elementary and secondary education. The amount of teaching experience ranged from one to twenty years with a mean of 8.6 years and a standard deviation of 4.7 years. Nearly all grade levels and certification areas were represented with the highest percentages in elementary school (17.5%), middle school (8%), and in secondary level English (8%). Ten percent (10% were tenured. All teachers held degrees from colleges and universities within daily commuting distance. Only twenty percent (20%) of the RIF'd teachers held masters degrees. Fifteen percent

(15%) were actively working toward a masters degree. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the teachers did not hold a masters' degree and were not actively working toward an advanced degree.

Reactions to being RIF'd. Teachers reactions to receiving a RIF notice were computed from responses to an open ended question. The most frequently listed reaction was anger (34%) followed by acceptance (21%), frustration (15%) and depression (14%).

Steps taken to prevent being RIF'd. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the teachers indicated they had taken no steps to decrease the probability of being RIF'd. The most frequent strategies employed were enrolling in college coursework (29%), applying for tenure (6%) and increasing school activities (4%).

Willingness to relocate. Teachers responded on a seven point scale concerning their willingness to relocate and on their perceived chances of being recalled before school reopened in the Fall. Most of the sample believed their chances of being recalled were good ($\bar{X}$=5.26). At the time of the workshop the participants indicated an unwillingness to relocate ($\bar{X}$-5.28) on a seven point scale. Those teachers who considered themselves secondary wage earners were less likely to be willing to relocate than those who considered themselves primary wage earners (t-3.17, p .01). Subjects who were married were less willing to relocate than those who were single (t-2.37, p .05). Strong family and social ties was the most frequent reason for unwillingness to consider relocating. Sixty-five percent (65%) rated this reason either a one or a two on a seven point scale. Significant negative relationships were found between a RIF'd teachers willingness to relocate and a) years teaching experience (r=-.28), b) strong family and social ties (r=-.51), c) amount of formal education (r=-.27), and d) dependent children (r=-.27). A significant positive relationship was found between willingness to relocate and primary wage earner status (r=.39).

Resources used by RIF'd teachers. Teachers who were RIF'd desired jobs primarily in three areas: 1) teaching in another school district, 2) educator or trainer in business or industry and 3) a management position in business and industry. The resources most frequently utilized in seeking another position were personal contacts (57%) and local newspapers (50%). Fewer than ten percent (10%) utilized the free services of the Career Planning and Placement Service at the university co-sponsoring the workshop.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

The results of the study raise several issues about RIF'd teachers that have educational and research implications.

1) Are teachers who receive RIF notices realistic about their future teaching prospects? At the time of the workshop many of the teachers expected to be rehired before school reopened, yet ten months after the workshop sixty-five percent had taken no steps to reduce the probability of receiving another RIF notice.

2) Are teachers who receive RIF notices serious about seeking positions which require relocating or about seeking alternate careers? The majority of the RIF'd teachers waited to see if they would be recalled before they actively began seeking another position. Personal contacts and local newspapers were the predominant resources utilized in job seeking. Few used any other re-resources.

3) Is the willingness of RIF'd teachers to protect against RIFing in the future characteristic of individuals entering the profession or of teachers established in the profession? The profile of the RIF'd teacher is not one of youth and inexperience as might be expected if all teachers were continually working toward professional development. The available data does not, however, permit direct comparison of RIF'd and non RIF'd teachers in each of the 17 school districts represented.

4) Is the unwillingness of these teachers to relocate a general characteristic of teachers? Does this unwillingness to relocate interact with failure to work toward advanced degrees or to actively seek alternative positions or careers? The available data does not provide for comparison of this sample with teachers who have obtained advanced degrees or with individuals who have actively pursued positions outside the geographic area or in alternate careers. The data from this sample shows that a large proportion of the RIF'd teachers who are either single and/or the primary wage earner and who have no dependents have not pursued advanced degrees. They also seem to be unwilling to consider relocating.

5) Were the teachers who received RIF notices essentially those teachers who most deserved not to be rehired? The data indicates that this may be the case since the average age of the RIF'd teacher was 36.9 years with 8.4 years of teaching experience. Only 10% had received tenure. Sixty-five percent (65%) had done no work toward an advanced degree. Only 35% of the RIF'd teachers had taken any steps to decrease the probability of receiveing another RIF notice.